
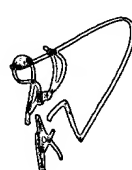


CLAIMS

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1. A method of forming an image, comprising providing a layer of plastics material over a substrate, the substrate having at least one reflective region thereon, and selectively altering the optical properties of portions of the plastics material so as to form an image therein.
 2. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the at least one reflective region comprises a metal film.
 3. A method as claimed in claim 2, wherein the metal film is printed onto the substrate.
 4. A method as claimed in claim 3, in which the metal film is provided on a carrier film and is brought into contact with the substrate at a printing station and transferred to the substrate.
 5. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the layer of plastics material is provided on a carrier film and in which a plurality of heater elements are provided on a thermal print head, and in which the heater elements are energised when the carrier film is in contact with the substrate to transfer the plastics material to the substrate.
 6. A method as claimed in claim 5, in which the heating elements are energised to deposit a continuous layer of the plastics material over the whole of the area to be covered such that the plastics material serves as a protective coating.
 7. A method as claimed in claim 6, in which selected regions of the plastics material are heated to a greater degree than other areas so as to vary the surface appearance of the plastics layer.
 8. A method as claimed in claim 7, in which the full thickness of the plastics film is deposited and selected portions thereof are overheated so as to give these portions a different appearance.
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9. A method as claimed in claim 8, in which the overheated portions have a satin appearance.
10. A method as claimed in claim 8, in which the overheated portions have a matt appearance.
11. A method as claimed in claim 1, in which the image is printed over the substrate in a repeating pattern.
12. A method as claimed in claim 1, in which the layer of plastics material is deposited on the substrate during a printing process, and in which the image to be formed in the plastics film is held in a memory device readable by one of the printer and a data processor controlling the printer.
13. A method as claimed in claim 12, in which the memory device is a removable device.
14. A method as claimed in claim 12, in which the image is held in an encrypted form.
15. A surface printed in accordance with the method of claim 1.
16. A printed item, said item having a substrate bearing on at least a portion thereof a reflective element and a plastics layer deposited over the substrate and the reflective element, the optical properties of the plastics layer altered in at least the region overlying the reflective element.
17. A printed item as claimed in claim 16, in which the plastics layer is deposited as a substantially uniform layer.
18. A printed item as claimed in claim 17, in which portions of the plastics layer are overheated in order to change the appearance of those portions.

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19. A printed item as claimed in claim 16, in which the item is an identity card.

20. A printed item as claimed in claim 16, in which the item is one of a security card, bank card, licence and credit card.

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